

# Cruise Ships, Community, and Collective Memory at Millars Plantation, Eleuthera, Bahamas

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**Abstract** Tourism is a central part of contemporary Bahamian life. Yet, the complex relationship between Bahamian cultural identity and dependency on the tourism industry has also created an interesting space for resistance for many Bahamian communities. Incorporating Black feminist archaeological theory and a community-collaborative approach, this project has provided a plausible alternative interpretation of the larger effects of the remnants of the colonial past, the contemporary tourist economy, and the complicated relationship between developing cultural heritage sites in the region and the needs of local community members. The Millars Plantation, in the southern region of the island of Eleuthera, provided the research team an opportunity to explore, through oral history and small-scale memory mapping, a concentrated view of how the plantation landscape operated as a site of captivity, then a site of survival, and ultimately a space of ancestral connection between people, history, landscapes, and contemporary tourism.

**Extracto** El turismo es una parte central de la vida contemporánea de las Bahamas. Sin embargo, la compleja relación entre la identidad cultural de las Bahamas y la dependencia de la industria turística ha creado también un interesante espacio para la resistencia

para muchas comunidades de las Bahamas. Mediante la incorporación de la teoría arqueológica feminista negra y un enfoque de colaboración con la comunidad, el presente proyecto ha proporcionado una interpretación alternativa plausible de los efectos más amplios de los restos del pasado colonial, la economía turística contemporánea, y la complicada relación entre los sitios del patrimonio cultural en desarrollo en la región y las necesidades de los miembros de la comunidad local. La Plantación Millars, en la región sur de la isla de Eleuthera, proporcionó al equipo de investigación una oportunidad para explorar, mediante la historia oral y el mapeo de memoria a pequeña escala, una visión concentrada de cómo el paisaje de la plantación operaban como un sitio de cautividad, después como un sitio de supervivencia, y finalmente como un espacio de conexión ancestral entre las personas, la historia, los paisajes, y el turismo contemporáneo.

**Résumé** Le tourisme est un élément central de la vie contemporaine des Bahamas. Pourtant, la relation complexe entre l'identité culturelle des Bahamas et la dépendance vis-à-vis du secteur touristique a également créé un espace intéressant pour la résistance pour de nombreuses communautés des Bahamas. Intégrant la théorie archéologique féministe noire et une approche communautaire collaborative, ce projet a proposé une autre interprétation plausible des effets majeurs des restes du passé colonial, de l'économie touristique contemporaine et de la relation compliquée entre les sites de patrimoine culturel en développement dans la région et les besoins des membres des communautés

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locales. La plantation de Millars, dans la région sud de l'île d'Eleuthera, a permis à l'équipe de recherche d'explorer, à travers l'histoire orale et la cartographie de la mémoire à petite échelle, une vue concentrée sur le mode de fonctionnement du paysage de la plantation comme site de captivité puis comme site de survie, et enfin comme espace de liens ancestraux entre les gens, l'histoire, les paysages et le tourisme contemporain.

**Keywords** Bahamas · tourism · Caribbean · heritage · Black feminist archaeology · community-based archaeology

## Introduction

Tourism is a central part of contemporary Bahamian life. The islands are located in the North Atlantic Ocean, rather than the Caribbean Sea, which situates the country at the periphery of “mainstream Caribbean existence” (Palmer 1994:5). In other words, Bahamian cultural identity is distinct from the larger Caribbean region. It has been described as “the gateway to the Caribbean,” the place where Columbus landed before he landed on Hispaniola (Shaun Ingraham 2013, pers. comm.). Yet, the complex relationship between Bahamian cultural identity and dependence on the tourism industry has also created an interesting space for resistance for many Bahamian communities. Connecting Black feminist archaeological theory and the contemporary circumstances of tourism in the Caribbean provides a plausible alternative interpretation of how the colonial past, contemporary tourist economies, and the relationship of developing cultural heritage sites in the region intersect. In this article I seek to explore further this relationship between historical forms of oppression, contemporary implications of social, political, and economic circumstances of descendant communities, and the role of researcher. This article also seeks to examine the process of broadening the contextual understanding of how culture, community, and history function within the minds of people of African descent living in the Bahamas.

As a person of African descent from the United States, I have always had an uneasy tension related to Caribbean tourism. One of the sources of this tension for me is best described by historian Ian Strachan as a complex relationship between travel, paradise, and colonialism. He also sees “Caribbean tourism [a]s a direct offshoot of the plantation system” (Strachan 2002;

Nixon 2011:2). Where the Bahamas failed in sugar and cotton production, it has “benefitted from the ‘unproductive’ landscape and perceived ‘perfect’ picture of paradise” (Nixon 2011:2). This article seeks to show how tourism in the Bahamas maintained a dependent economic system that has therefore created a space for individual communities to come together to create or transform the traditional historical narratives (Shackel 2003:3). Heritage tourism and the heritage industry becomes one of the vehicles for communities to reshape the past as a resource and form of cultural production (Robb 1998:580).

## “It’s Better in the Bahamas”

Tourism and its related activities account for 60% of the gross domestic product in the Bahamas and employ over 50% of the country’s working force. The second-largest revenue source is banking and offshore investments (Fazio and Pinder 2014:6). The Bahamas, therefore, has a tradition of providing services and pleasure. This has translated into a heavy dependence on imported consumer goods and food from the United States and Europe to satisfy both the tourist and local populations (Palmer 1994:5).

“The contemporary tourist visiting the Bahamas is not merely visiting a country that is different culturally, socially and environmentally, but also one that, in many instances, conjures up images of a colonial past, of a country that was once part of a British Empire” (Palmer 1994:4). From the bow of a ship, on a short jaunt to preapproved points of interest, or nestled comfortably beside a pool at an all-inclusive resort hotel with an umbrella drink and the sun shining brightly is how most tourists experience the island paradise. They are far removed from the daily lives of their host communities or the complexities of their cultural or national identities. The business of service is the primary site of interaction. Ports of call become the places one can sample just enough “local” fare, lie on the perfect pink or white sand beaches, and, if one is extra adventurous, take a preapproved guided tour on an air-conditioned bus with organized stops that provide a closer look at the beauty and splendor of one’s island destination.

On the island of New Providence there is a capital city, Nassau. It is the home to huge resort complexes, such as Atlantis, Sandals, and Baha Mar. Despite the appearance of luxury and abundance, there continue to

be unemployment rates in double digits (the majority of the unemployed are under 30 years of age) (Fazio and Pinder 2014:6). The rapid turnover rate of casino and resort positions, the persistent dependency on hiring undocumented Haitian migrants, and the seasonal rhythms of a tourist-based industry impact the daily lives of Bahamians. These overcrowded conditions and elements of economic insecurity have translated into some Bahamians looking back toward their home. “Back home” for many living in Nassau is the “Out Islands” (renamed the Family Islands in 1972).

These islands, in particular, provide more than a connection to the past, family, and memories, they also provide the possibility for reclamation and a community rebuilding and a renewed sense of a distinct Bahamian past. This is the space where the story of archaeology at Millars Plantation begins, where, on the island of Eleuthera, a local community joined together to fight the tide of development and highlight its local heritage, culture, and history (Brabec and Chilton 2013).

### **The Bahamas: “Islands of the Shallow Sea”**

“The myth of paradise has a long and extensive history grounded in colonial rule, slavery, and travel narratives,” as argued by Strachan (Strachan 2002; Nixon 2011:2). The history of tourism in the Bahamas is worth visiting, briefly. My first experience of the centrality of the industry was during my first trip to the Bannermantown Homecoming Celebration on Eleuthera. Junkanoo, a street parade in many towns and settlements across the Bahamas every Boxing Day (26 December) and New Year’s Day (1 January) with music, dance, and costumes of Akan origin, is a celebration that reflects a sense of cultural pride, a tradition that dates back to a colonial past and slavery. During the celebration there was a junior Junkanoo parade that included a few floats that had been used in the larger island-wide Junkanoo earlier in the year. The float read: “The Bahamas, 50 Years of Tourism.” This was surprising because that particular year was also the 40th anniversary of Bahamian independence, yet the float was dedicated to tourism, something that seemed an important aspect of contemporary Bahamian life.

As I watched the procession, I was reminded of an essay, written by June Jordan, recalling a quick

vacation to the Bahamas. She remarked on how the Ministry of Tourism brochure that sat prominently in her room described Bahamian history in a welcome message to visitors to the island of New Providence:

New World History begins on the same day that modern Bahamian history begins—October 12, 1492. That’s when Columbus stepped ashore—British influence came first with the Eleutheran Adventurers of 1647—After the Revolution, American Loyalists fled the newly independent states and settled in the Bahamas. Confederate blockade-runners used the island as a haven during the War between the States, and after the War, a number of Southerners moved to the Bahamas. (Jordan 2002:211)

Jordan continues by pointing out that

something that proclaims itself a legitimate history and all it does is track white Mr. Columbus to the British Eleutherians through Confederate Southerners as they barge into New World surf, land on New World turf, and nobody saying one word about the Bahamian people, the Black peoples, to whom the only things new in their island world was weird succession of crude intruders and its colonial consequences. (Jordan 2002:212)

In many of my informal discussion with participants in the Bannermantown celebration, I realized that Afro-Bahamians know this story well: a story of consequences and colonialism, which for June Jordan translated into her discomfort with how to relate to the Black woman who cleaned her room or the bartender who prepared her next drink. I could relate to this discomfort. I was confused by the emphasis on the colonial past in a way that seemed different from the narrative of captivity in the United States. I wanted to know more about before Columbus and why the legacy of captivity and bondage was so different from my own experience as the descendant of captive Africans from Jamaica and the U.S. South.

In the Bahamas, as well as other islands of the Caribbean, the prehistoric settling of the islands was a

part of the lengthy process of exploration, migration, and colonization (Berman and Gnivecki 1995). Precontact archaeological research on pottery and phytolith analysis in the Bahamas have helped archaeologists to understand the earliest inhabitants of the archipelago (Berman and Gnivecki 1995; Berman and Pearsall 2008). The Bahamas includes approximately 29 islands and 661 cays. The earliest inhabitants were the Taino, who appear in the archaeological record as early as A.D. 600–800, followed by their descendants, the Lucayan (Sears and Sullivan 1978; Rose 1982; Berman and Gnivecki 1995). The Lucayans were short-range mariners, living in small coastal villages where they subsisted on a limited agriculture, based primarily on manioc cultivation, and the natural resources of the sea (Craton and Saunders 1992). The Lucayan were also among the first indigenous groups to experience European imperialism directly. They first encountered the Spanish, followed by the French, Danish, Dutch, and English (Berman and Gnivecki 1995).

The geographical position of the Bahama Islands was advantageous to any colonial power invested in maintaining a presence in the Caribbean. Initially the Spanish claimed the Bahamas, but this was short-lived, and they eventually abandoned all attempts to set up a permanent colony in the scattered islands (Craton and Saunders 1992). The French also attempted to take the islands, but abandoned them for the Antilles, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, as well as Saint Dominique (Craton and Saunders 1992). The first English ventures overseas were forged, in part, to challenge the preeminence of Spain, Portugal, and France in the Americas (Saunders 1983; Craton and Saunders 1992).

The most transformative moment in the settling of the Bahamas was the resettlement of American Loyalists just after the Treaty of Versailles (Craton and Saunders 1992). Following the American Revolution upwards of 100,000 refugees, mostly from the southern United States (the Carolinas and Georgia), were relocated and given large parcels of land. These Loyalists brought to the Bahamas, in captivity, a large population of creole-born Africans, with the intentions of establishing a cotton plantation economy in the Bahamas (Saunders 1983; Craton and Saunders 1992; Johnson 1996). Following a brief period of prosperity, the cotton plantation economy failed in 1800 due to poor soil quality, an unforgiving terrain, and multiple insect attacks. Many plantations cleared the land, experimented with sugar production and salt

raking, and utilized mixed farming strategies in order to survive into the early 19th century (Wilkie and Farnsworth 1995; Farnsworth 2001). However, most of these plantations were poverty stricken, and the activities of the plantation owners and captive African people focused primarily on subsistence activities, with captives and planters living and working in close proximity, but separated by a racially based social hierarchy (Craton and Saunders 1992).

Historians have asserted a weak “absentee planter class” throughout the Bahamas, especially in the years leading up to emancipation in 1834, which created a unique social and cultural system on the islands (Craton and Saunders 1992; Johnson 1996). In the archaeological study of Polly Hill Plantation on the Bahamian out island of San Salvador, Baxter and Burton (2006) argued that captive African peoples throughout the out islands possessed a greater amount of autonomy than captives throughout the Americas or even on Nassau due to the exodus of the White planter class and the emergence of a creole African majority.

### Eleuthera, the Isle of Freedom

A group calling themselves the “Company of Adventurers for the Plantation of the Island of Eleutheria” collectively drew up a document named the “Articles and Orders” (Albury 1975:41). This document was the first constitution of the Bahamas. Escaping religious persecution and restrictions, this group, also known as the Eleutheran Adventurers, established Eleutheria as a republic, “the first in the New World, with a Governor, a Council of twelve and a Senate of 100” (Albury 1975:41).

After several attempts to find a suitable island to settle in the Bahamas, Captain William Sayle, an ex-governor of Bermuda, used his qualifications as a businessman and able administrator to enter into a venture to find a permanent home for the growing number of Bermuda independents. Sayle, along with three others, purchased the *William*, a ship that would take the independents to Eleuthera. The arrival in 1648 was not smooth; the *William* wrecked close to the shore, and the passengers had to take refuge in a cave, now known as “Preacher’s Cave,” due to a large boulder shaped like a pulpit and which was the site where religious services were held during the “difficult” early years, a symbol of the freedom

to worship freely and without constraint (Albury 1975; Saunders 1983; Farnsworth 1996; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005).

Strictly speaking, the name ‘Eleutheran Adventurers’ belongs to the twenty-six proprietors who promoted the venture. But it is doubtful if any of these, with the exception of Sayle, ever saw the Bahamas. To the Bahamian people the Eleutheran Adventurers were, and will always be, that remarkable group of men and women who left their homes and their homelands and came to the Bahamas in search of freedom. (Albury 1975:46)

The venture succeeded, sort of. Many, including Sayle (who at some point became governor of South Carolina), eventually left, leaving a smattering of self-exiled Royalists on the island, keeping the settlements quite sparse (Saunders 1983).

As time passed, the relationship between the Lords Proprietors of the Bahamas and Carolina Proprietors of strengthened; most perceived the mainland as a second homeland (Albury 1975). Trade with the mainland was seen as the “lifeblood” of the archipelago. Bahamians traveled back and forth to England and colonies, such as Carolina, Virginia, and Massachusetts (Albury 1975; Saunders 1983). However, a few events in the late 1770s, such as the Treaty of Versailles and the American Revolution, translated into more British (now called) Loyalists who fled to British territories, such as Jamaica, Dominica, and the Bahamas (Albury 1975). Most of these Loyalists settled on islands in the Bahamas, such as New Providence, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma, Cat Island, Long Island, Crooked Island, and Acklins and Watlings islands (or San Salvador), between 1783 and 1785.

These plantation-focused settlers preferred the southern Family Islands, such as Crooked, Acklins, Long Cay, Cat, Watlings, Rum Cay, and Exuma—the Bahamian home of a different type of cotton enterprise. Population growth was relatively slow in the 134 years that Europeans inhabited the islands. However, during the 3 years after 1782, newcomers were to “stream into the islands in such numbers as to seem a veritable human flood” (Albury 1975:109). These settlers changed the social structure of the society and set down racial lines to be followed for centuries to come (Saunders 1983).

Eleuthera, located 50 mi. east of Nassau and 260 mi. south of Miami, is long and thin—110 mi. long and in

some areas less than 1 mi. wide. Marketed as one of the “best-kept” secrets of the Bahama islands, it is described as a place away from the “cruise tourists,” a place where time seems to stand still, the land that time forgot, the place where you seem to “get lost and then somehow find yourself” (Islands of the Bahamas 2016).

I arrived on the island as a part of a collaborative project between U.S.- and Eleutheran-based community organizations. A part of the University of Massachusetts Amherst Center for Heritage and Society team had recently partnered with the One Eleuthera Foundation, Haynes Library Redevelopment Group, and the Governor’s Harbour Heritage Trust. The basic goals of the project were to assess how heritage could be a tool for social and economic development through understanding components such as *identity* (written history, archaeology, landscapes, and intangible heritage); *health and wellness* (public health); *ecology* (sustainability, environmental management, and climate change); and *intellectual property* and *public policy issues* (Chilton and Silberman 2010; Brabec and Chilton 2013).

My role was to “take a look” at the Millars Settlement, far away from Governor’s Harbour, and search for the most likely place where archaeology could contribute the most information for the descendant community. The push for archaeology on the southern part of the island came from members of the community who were moving “back home” and directly fighting outside development. Through collective brainstorming with local community members, it was agreed to identify unrecognized or disappearing heritage resources of families and the land.

As mentioned earlier, in historical archaeology in the Caribbean the impact of African populations on material, landscapes, and culture was accepted fairly early (Armstrong and Hauser 2009). However, the result often meant limiting the discussion of the movement of Africans (or the African diaspora) as just another means of migration to the islands of the Caribbean, not as a larger discussion of people, migration, and impact (Armstrong and Hauser 2009). A focus on forts, great houses, and colonial era monuments dominated the early work of historical archaeology in the Caribbean (Mathewson 1972; Noël Hume and Mayes 1972). Beginning with more of a material focus on locally produced earthenwares and colonial era material culture, archaeologists were able to think



critically about captive African people, which then also (as in the U.S.) translated into a greater reliance by historical archaeologists on a holistic approach to the analysis of plantation landscapes, burial sites, and the ruins of former captive settlements in order to interpret the daily lives of African-descent populations (Armstrong 1990; Agorsah 1992; Handler 1997; Armstrong and Hauser 2009).

#### Putting Millars Plantation “Back on the Map”

Research on the Millars Plantation site draws upon earlier historical archaeologies of plantation sites in the Bahamas, including the extensive archaeological study of Clifton Plantation on New Providence (Farnsworth 1994, 1996, 1999, 2000; Wilkie and Farnsworth 1995, 1997, 1999, 2005; Wilkie 1999, 2000), studies occurring at South West Bay Plantation on New Providence (Aarons 1991), Crooked Island (Wilkie and Farnsworth 1995; Wilkie 1996), and San Salvador (Gerace 1982, 1987; Shaklee 1994; Baxter and Burton 2006, 2007). For contemporary Bahamians, the archaeology of Clifton Plantation stands out as one of the most successful examples of Afro-Bahamian history (Shaun Ingraham 2014, pers. comm.). The work examined the expression of African sensibility through material culture and the negotiation and construction of an Afro-Bahamian identity in a captive, multiethnic African community. The authors argued that while Caribbean archaeologists have successfully identified the expression of West African heritage and traditions, as well as objects that were African in origin or manufacture, this site complicated the traditional narrative of the assimilation of captives and adoption of the cultural traditions and practices of the Loyalist captors. At Clifton Plantation even the presence of specific European goods was still an expression of an African sensibility or aesthetic (Wilkie 1996, 1999; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005).

In their study of long-term historical change at Polly Hill Plantation on San Salvador, Baxter and Burton (2006, 2007) argued that African descent communities held captive on this Bahamian “out” island generally lacked access to markets on Nassau and the ability to purchase items expressing this African sensibility or aesthetic. Nevertheless, the authors assert that this community utilized the plantation landscape and material goods in such a way that still expressed African and

creole preference in the years leading up to emancipation (Baxter and Burton 2007). Additionally, the archaeological study of the material manifestations of the transition from captivity to freedom is of growing importance within historical archaeology, with Armstrong’s (2003a, 2003b) extensive study of the East End community and the emergence of a free Caribbean culture on St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, contributing greatly to this conversation.

There are preliminary indications that the Millars Plantation site shares similar attributes to those interpreted at Clifton and Polly Hill plantations. Although we archaeologists have not broken ground at the main plantation-house complex, we do know that there is a unique history of continuous occupation and connections between the plantation and the contemporary descendant population. The Millars Plantation, originally owned by a George Millar, most likely from the Carolinas, was then passed to his son, Robert, of New Providence, who was the owner that likely experienced the quick decline of the Bahamian cotton economy. His will states:

I, will, devise, bequeath, and give unto my loving sister Ann Millar, of the Island of New Providence Spinster: All, and every, my Messuages, Lands, and Tenements, and Heriditaments, ~ whatsoever, and wheresoever! together ~ with All my Goods, Chattels, Personal ~ Estate, all debts due me, and all Monies, and interest invested in the British Funds or elsewhere, that I may die possessed of [after the payment of my personal expenses and just debts] to her, the said Ann Millar, to her sole use, and behoof, and to her Lawful Heirs and Assigns forever! (Bahamas National Archives 1845)

After inheriting the Millar property, the surviving daughter, Ann, never married and had no direct heirs. She in turn, left the entire Eleuthera property to her freedwomen and -men and their descendants, forever. In her 1869 will, Ann Millar states:

The tract of land on the island of Eleuthera known as ‘Millar’s Settlement’ containing about one thousand acres, a part of which, however, I have already disposed of, I give and devise the residue thereof to my old servants and former slaves old Scipio, and his wife Phyllis, old Harriet, Tom and his wife Grace, and her children, sailor George and his wife, Sarah, and her children, Dinah

Millar, and her children, to be held and enjoyed by them in common and by their descendants forever. The land adjoining “Millars Settlement” aforesaid (excepting two hundred and fifty acres thereof) part of a tract originally granted to William A. Bowles, I give and devise unto my old servants and former slaves now residing or who may be residing at the time of my death, on “Millars Settlement” aforesaid including also the last mentioned parties and old Jack, his wife Chloe and her children, and Allan Millar, to be held and enjoyed by their in common, and by their descendants forever. (Bahamas National Archives 1869)

The Millars Plantation site occupation spans the early Loyalist period in the 1790s through the pre-independence period in the 1960s. This length of occupation provided the opportunity to explore, through oral history and the collective memories of living descendants, the function of the property over time. Although the Millars Plantation descendants recount much about the final occupation period (pre- and post-independence), many of the details about the plantation era have started to emerge through active engagement with community partners.

The site’s location, on the largely underdeveloped southern area of the island, gives a concentrated view of how the plantation landscape operated as first a site of captivity, then a site of survival, and ultimately a space of ancestral connection that provides a more holistic understanding of the relationship between people, culture, landscapes, and contemporary tourism. Historical archaeology in the Caribbean has for decades explored the changing patterns in the use of plantation landscapes as these spaces shift from sites of captivity to sites of freedom (Pulsipher and Goodwin 1982; Goodwin 1987; Armstrong 1990; Pulsipher 1991; Handler 1997; Delle 1998; Havisser 1999; Armstrong and Kelly 2000; Armstrong and Hauser 2009). The Millars Plantation site has the potential for contributing to this interpretive model.

When the Millars Plantation Site Project began, the local community was excited about the possibility of how archaeological research could enhance their ongoing efforts to tell the story of Millars Plantation. The research team began by meeting with community members and conducting formal and semiformal interviews. Work began in the midst of a land-dispute case between a Nassau developer and a newly formed group named the Bannermantown, Millars, John Millars Community

Organization. Although this may not be the ideal context in which to begin a long-term archaeological project, it did provide a direct connection between researchers and members of the Bannermantown (Millars) community at a crossroads, the very space where people were “coming back together” to fight for their land, actively learn about their ancestors, and eagerly take control of the narrative of the local past.

The research team has learned a great deal since laying out its initial research questions and methods. Originally focusing efforts on conducting a “memory mapping” project as the first phase, it quickly came to light that this was a difficult task. A majority of the team’s community partners were elderly and could not walk the overgrown and elevated terrain. We team members stepped back from that initial approach and continued our ongoing interviews with the southern Eleutheran community in their homes, at various church events, and at the annual Bannermantown Homecoming Celebrations. As described earlier, many of the structures were lived in by elders into the 1960s, which meant that many of our interviews were with people who had memories of visiting, playing in, and maintaining the very buildings occupied during and after the plantation era. Community partners shared their own experiences in these buildings, not the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, the era of captivity, or emancipation, but stories of how people used the land, grew food, cooked bread in outdoor ovens, and continued to carry out daily activities, helping provide the means for us to develop a more focused archaeological survey of the property (George Bullard 2013, pers. comm.).

In southern Eleuthera, with an economy based marginally on tourism, it was difficult to locate members of the community who were between 16 and 60 years of age. People traditionally moved away from Eleuthera to find employment in places like Nassau, Freeport, or the United States (Errol McPhee 2013, pers. comm.). Team members did not face issues of community discord, described in other community-based archaeological projects (McDavid 2004). Millars, therefore, was becoming a community symbol of a distinct Afro-Eleutheran past. Yet, because tourism is such an integral part of the country, community members recognized, through their current struggle to control their ancestral land, that there was the potential to create a form of cultural tourism that addressed and respected their heritage and identity, and at the same time left a legacy based on their

story through their words, creating what some Eleutherans called a “real” Bahamian story.

What we team members have learned in our mixed methods approach is that a majority of the community has remarkable stories about the plantation over time. There are a great many stories passed down about Ann Millar, including a lot about specific architectural and structural features, from locations of a “slave wall” to “slave burying grounds” and other “Millars related places” (Mildred Young 2013, pers. comm.). Without our interviews and informal conversations, there would have been a steeper learning curve about the relationship between the past and the contemporary landscape. These conversations have also led the research team to locate several potential sites associated with the pre-emancipation period of Millars.

### Diasporic Complexities

Repeated trips to the island and longer stays in the southern region have been rewarding. We on the research team have come to learn about the dynamics and complexities of intraracial politics (skin color, citizenship status, gender, class, and education) and other subtle aspects of daily Eleutheran life. The harsh treatment of undocumented Haitian migrants, the prevalence of health-related concerns, and the economic uncertainty of the social and situational context of a place like southern Eleuthera all help to bring into focus the usefulness of African diaspora archaeology for our community partners. Our engagement is with a community entrenched in a fight for property. Yet we cannot forget that the Bahamian government is implicated in aspects of the approval of large land sales, and the project still needs to obtain permits and other necessary permissions to work and do research in the country. The current court case marks the first time Eleutherans have stood up for their land rights, and the case has brought together upward of 500 descendants who can trace their ancestry to those families named in Ann Millar’s will. This made it easy to “find the community,” but also reminds us of the difficult position we are in as outside researchers.

Eleuthera is historically viewed as the place where Bahamian history begins. The project to highlight the tangible, intangible, and natural heritage of the island through archaeology and historical structure

restoration is positively viewed by most Eleutherans and associated stakeholders as a method that centers the community in the creation and development of a locally based historical memory. This approach challenges traditional categories of heritage studies by making local stakeholders part of the development process and integrating the process into a past that is more flexible and meets the needs of the society over time.

To interpret a site of Eleutheran/Afro-Bahamian heritage that highlights the rich history of a particular settlement and the incredible pride of the Millars Plantation descendants has always been the primary goal of these collaborative efforts. Millars Plantation as a heritage site promises to establish a space that is related to the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, the system of captivity in the U.S., and the connectivity of African diaspora culture in the New World.

### Breaking Boundaries of African Diaspora Archaeology

But in our tourist brochures the Caribbean is a blue pool into which the republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft. This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that highpitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile. What is the earthly paradise for our visitors? Two weeks without rain and a mahogany tan, and, at sunset, local troubadours in straw hats and floral shirts beating “Yellow Bird” and “Banana Boat Song” to death. There is a territory wider than this—wider than the limits made by the map of an island—which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers. (Walcott 1992)

To grasp fully the impact of captivity within the borders of the United States, the narrative of captivity must also begin to be connected, in the U.S., with the Caribbean region as a whole. Many of the captive Africans that landed on the shores of the present U.S. first landed in the Caribbean. For much of my career, I



have fallen under the static notion of what Gates describes as an “African-American exceptionalism,” whereby we Americans of African descent see captivity in the New World as primarily about *us* (Gates 2014). What Eleuthera has taught me is that slavery is about *us*, yet, not exclusively; the African diaspora is made up of malleable boundaries and fluid definitions. I have learned from my U.S.-centric African diasporic assumptions that captivity is understood along a connected continuum that is fraught by the idea that I understand the system of slavery as an amorphous object. This has not been the case in southern Eleuthera. Therefore, I seek to challenge *us* as archaeologists to think about captivity with a more dynamic diasporic sensibility, a sensibility that weaves our often narrow categories of North Americanists, Caribbeanists, or Africanists into more direct dialogue about the impact removal and captivity had on African women, men, and children, my ancestors in the widest sense of the word. Eleuthera has become that space where I must challenge my African American (nationalist) assumptions and clearly see how a community-based Caribbean archaeology becomes more than the interpretation of a single plantation, with a renewed energy to resist the single story of tourism and, in many senses, what being a “Bahamian” actually means.

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